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Citation: Mort, Maggie, Convery, Ian, Baxter, Josephine and Bailey, Cathy (2008) Animal disease and human trauma: The psychosocial implications of the 2001 UK Foot and Mouth disease disaster. *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*, 11 (2). pp. 133-148. ISSN 1088-8705

Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10888700801925984>  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10888700801925984>>

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# **Animal Disease and Human Trauma: The Psychosocial Implications of the 2001 UK Foot and Mouth Disease Disaster**

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## **Abstract**

The 2001 UK foot and mouth disease (FMD) crisis is commonly understood to have been a nonhuman animal problem, an economic industrial crisis that was resolved after eradication. By using a different lens, a longitudinal ethnographic study of the health and social consequences of the epidemic, the research reported here indicates that 2001 was a human tragedy as well as an animal one. In a diary-based study, it can be seen that life after the FMD crisis was accompanied by distress, feelings of bereavement, fear of a new disaster, loss of trust in authority and systems of control, and the undermining of the value of local knowledge. Diverse groups experienced distress well beyond the farming community. Such distress remained largely invisible to the range of “official” inquiries into the disaster. That an FMD epidemic of the scale of 2001 could happen again in a developed country is a deeply worrying prospect, but it is to be hoped that contingency plans are evolving along with enhanced understanding of the human, animal, and financial cost.